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## Mrs Stamford

by Richard Lewis

As a five-year old Tom thought Mrs Stamford ancient, at least a hundred. He would like to have told her “You’re a little scary sometimes, you know that”, but of course he didn’t.

We never know what to expect when we enter a building or room but there should have been a sign outside saying “enter at your peril”, when it came to the house at the bottom of the hill and its strange goings on. It was the one with the green gate that rattled on rusty hinges. A house pretending to be a school with bedrooms dressed up as class-rooms.

Tom had to steel himself every time he entered that alien world.

Mrs Stamford was something of an oddity. A relic from bygone times, always wearing the same dark blue suit and tie. Grey hair scraped severely into a bun, usually topped with a beret, making her look like an old French resistance fighter. Her face, a battlefield of lines and wrinkles. Below her skirt hung a pair of thickly stockinged legs that reminded Tom of tree trunks. He knew he was being unkind with that thought but couldn’t help it, she’d showed him no kindness. Ruling by fear, the sharp edge of the ruler always eager and willing.

Apparently, Mrs Stamford had a reputation for getting pupils through exams but what did Tom know or care about that. He cringed whenever she came near, sliding along the floor, dragging her feet across the lino to plant her considerable backside on the brass fire guard. This had sagged mightily from her weight over the years.

Tom felt he should have some compassion for her but he didn’t. Those wasted hours watching the clock, waiting for school day to end or being dispatched to the corner of the room to stare at the globe had done him no favours.

The five-year sentence was decades ago, yet to this day, a trace of Stamford's would sometimes show itself in his reluctance to enter a building or room.

Like the swinging gate he felt its ghostly workings, rusting away inside him.